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**SB 791 – Correctional Services and Public Safety – Immigration Enforcement– Prohibitions  
(Community Trust Act)**

**Hearing before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee on Jan. 25, 2026**

**Position: FAVORABLE**

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The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty law firm which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. The PJC provides advice and representation to clients with low-income, advocates before legislatures and government agencies, and collaborates with community and advocacy organizations; we actively incorporate anti-racism and racial equity goals into our advocacy work. Our organization frequently represents and partners with immigrants and immigrant communities impacted by this legislation. For example, we represent immigrant clients in eviction cases and cases seeking to hold their landlord accountable for dangerous conditions of disrepair. We represent immigrant workers whose employers are paying less than minimum wage, denying overtime benefits, or unlawfully classifying them as contractors. We also represent the children of immigrants who have been unfairly excluded from educational opportunities and immigrant residents who have been wrongfully denied public benefits.

**Public Justice Center strongly supports SB 791, the Community Trust Act.** At its core, SB 791 is about upholding Maryland’s values - fairness, dignity, and justice for all. This bill affirms that our state should not be in the business of tearing families apart, undermining public trust, or diverting state and local resources into federal immigration enforcement. Instead, Maryland should remain focused on community safety, due process, and equal treatment under the law by prohibiting law enforcement and corrections cooperation with federal immigration enforcement absent a legal requirement or court order.

**ICE activities are having a cruel and inhumane impact on our clients – compromising public safety, disrupting services, and creating a culture of fear and distrust among our immigrant-clients.** For example, our Housing team frequently represents tenants who need to hold their landlord accountable for dangerous housing conditions and predatory practices. Landlords of our immigrant clients have threatened repeatedly to call ICE if our clients defend against the landlord’s wrongful eviction case or seek to hold the landlord accountable for dangerous housing defects. If we cannot assure our immigrant clients that local law enforcement will not cooperate with ICE by disrupting

their right to due process under the law, our clients are less likely to attend court – in which local law enforcement officers are always present – to defend against a wrongful eviction case or to hold the landlord accountable for dangerous conditions of disrepair. When our immigrant clients do not hold their landlords accountable in court for fear of ICE enforcement, the entire community loses too. When renters do not defend court cases and are subsequently evicted, the state pays more. [Preventing eviction saves the state money by reducing homelessness and state-funded safety net costs](#) related to shelter, educating students experiencing homelessness, health care, foster care, decreased incarceration, and the economic impacts of increased employment and income stability. Additionally, when renter-immigrants are terrified of speaking up for themselves because of the potential for ICE enforcement, the whole neighborhood suffers from the blight and decay perpetuated by negligent property owners.

In our representation of immigrant-workers, our clients will be less likely to report an employer who paid them below minimum wage if they think that engage with local law enforcement could result in ICE enforcement actions. We have seen firsthand that fewer workers are willing to come forward and participate in wage theft cases because they fear drawing attention to themselves in the current climate of ICE enforcement. When one worker's rights go unenforced, it weakens the rights of all workers. Unscrupulous employers and landlords will exploit these fears to prevent workers and tenants from speaking up for their rights.

SB 791 also provides important protections for clients of the PJC's Education Stability Project, which advances equity in public education by combatting practices that disproportionately push Black and brown children, and children with disabilities, out of school. Across the country, educators and school administrators have repeatedly observed the same pattern: fear of immigration consequences leads to lower attendance rates, reduced parent engagement, and reduced reporting of safety concerns. That does not make schools safer – it makes them less able to identify and prevent harm. The threat and fear of immigration enforcement impede equitable access to school and infringes upon the fundamental right of all Maryland children to receive a public education regardless of immigration status, which is enshrined in our state constitution. SB 791 is necessary to protect that right.

Our Health and Benefits Equity Project along with our community partners have observed a significant chilling effect with immigrant clients applying for safety net services, including SNAP and Medicaid, because of increased ICE activity around the country. We advocate to protect and expand access to healthcare and safety net services for individuals and families with low incomes. We support policies and practices that are designed to eliminate economic and racial inequities and enable every Marylander to attain their highest level of health. Several of our clients who are immigrants have expressed extreme reluctance to apply for safety net services for which they or their children are eligible because they are terrified that their household's information may be obtained by ICE and used to rip their family apart. This includes immigrant birthing people who have shared with us that they are terrified to apply for Medicaid coverage for which they are eligible

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through the Healthy Babies Equity Act, an important program expansion passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 2022 to ensure that birthing people, regardless of immigration status, have access to comprehensive, quality care during their pregnancy and postpartum journey and for their baby. Our immigrant client communities are carrying the immense emotional burden of choosing between their household's ability to thrive or risking their immediate physical safety. SB 791 would help ease some of the worry present in these communities by making clear that law enforcement and corrections officials cannot cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. It would also complement the incredible efforts our State has made to reduce health disparities.

Cooperation between federal immigration enforcement and state and local entities, like those that occurred under the 287(g) program, has a documented history of racial profiling, discrimination, and wrongful detention. It diverts local law enforcement away from their primary role of protecting public safety and erodes trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities. When trust is broken, community safety suffers.

Public Justice Center asks that the Committee **issue a FAVORABLE report on SB 791.**